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ABSTRACT

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), like most other higher education institutions, suffer from attrition problems. This study reveals that there are several ways to improve retention rates at HBCUs. More than 1,000 freshmen at 3 HBCUs were surveyed about the availability and quality of student services, specifically in the areas of enrollment management, financial assistance, residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services, and academic support services. The research findings presented here provide empirical support that there are significant relationships between the students' perceptions of the quality and availability of student services and freshman retention. Results indicate that privately funded HBCUs have an opportunity to correct retention problems that confront them by strengthening the quality of student services. (Contains 111 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Staying in College: Student Services and Freshman Retention at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

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STAYING IN COLLEGE: STUDENT SERVICES AND FRESHMAN RETENTION AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUs)

HBCUs like many other higher education institutions, suffer from attrition problems. This research reveals that there are several critical ways to improve the retention rates at HBCUs. Over 1000 freshman at three Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were surveyed about the availability and quality of student services, specifically in the areas of enrollment management, financial assistance, residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services, and academic support services. The research findings presented here provide empirical support that there are statistically significant relationships between the students' perception of the quality and availability of student services and freshman retention. In sum, privately-funded HBCUs have an opportunity to correct retention problems that confront them by strengthening the quality of student services they provide.

INTRODUCTION

Never have prospective college students had a larger number of institutions from which to choose. Currently America has more than 2000 four-year colleges (Snyder, 1999) which enroll students from increasingly diverse representations of cultures, socioeconomic classes, and levels of preparation for college work. Completing college is a major educational accomplishment that directly enhances an individual's opportunities for greater financial security and career advancement. Likewise, retention is a major factor in an institution's maintaining credibility and financial stability.

Recent findings (Barr, 2000; Graham & Gisi, 2000) on college persistence stress the integral role of an institution's specifying and adhering to its mission statement as well as indicating responsibilities that are to be undertaken by different components of the institution. This perspective is especially applicable to Historically Black Colleges

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and Universities (HBCUs). The retention goals in which student services personnel at HBCUs are involved are inextricably linked to the special mission of these institutions. Thus, in view of this research on retention at private HBCUs, it is both appropriate and useful to explain briefly the influences that determined the creation of HBCUs and to consider the critical role these institutions currently fulfill.

Black private and public institutions have a unique history in American higher education: they were founded after the Civil War for educating members of the Black population most of whom had been recently freed as a result of The Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 and could not attend White institutions of higher education because of racially exclusive admission policies. These first post-secondary institutions were established between 1865 and 1873 and include schools such as Virginia Union and Atlanta University (1865), Fisk University (1866), Howard University and Talladega College (1869). In 1871, Alcorn College, now Alcorn State University, became the first Black land grant college established under the Morrill Act of 1862. Later an additional 17 Black land grant colleges were started in the South under the Morrill Act of 1890; these schools provided agricultural, mechanical, and engineering training (Brazzell, 1992).

Currently the term HBCU designates institutions in a particular educational category: Black colleges and universities established prior to 1964 whose specific purpose remains the education of Black Americans. Additionally, each HBCU is legally authorized by the state in which it is located to provide an educational program for which a bachelor's or associate's degree can be conferred. Several HBCUs also award a significant number of master's, specialist, and doctoral degrees. Finally, each HBCU is accredited by a nationally recognized agency or association as determined by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. The 117 schools presently identified as

HBCUs do not represent an academic monolith but do instead differ along several dimensions (Roebuck & Murty,1993). While being open to diversity in accepting students and employing faculty and staff from various backgrounds, HBCUs have intentionally and consistently promoted the educational, political, occupational, and social advancement of Black people.

Despite their individual and collective accomplishments, HBCUs have been confronted with issues related to enrollment preferences and patterns. After the Brown *v.* Topeka Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954 increasing numbers of Black students enrolled in Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Consequently, HBCUs were placed under comparative scrutiny (Mow & Nettles, 1990; Richardson & Bender, 1987). When assessing HBCUs, some early critics (McGrath, 1965; Jencks & Reisman, 1967;1968; Sowell, 1972) held that a number of HBCUs were marginalized by financial difficulties, limited resources, and enrolling freshmen who were often less well-prepared economically and academically to pursue college studies. The current caliber of students and the quality of the education which students at HBCUs receive is viewed as competitive with that offered at other institutions (Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Mixon et al, 1995; Allen, 1992). Additionally, ratings of several HBCUs are included in the Black Enterprise 2001 Daystar Top Colleges and Universities for African Americans which used a modified version of the protocol developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The findings were based on the responses of 409 African American educational professionals' assessments of academic and social environment of 482 of the nation's colleges and universities. While HBCUs comprised only 10% of all colleges surveyed, they represented 34% of the top fifty institutions selected (Whigham& LaVeist, 2001).

Perhaps one of the clearest indicators of the continuing strengths of HBCUs is found in graduation statistics. The data for college enrollments at HBCUs in the 1990s reflect that these institutions continue to grant high proportions of baccalaureate and graduate degrees (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Further, in the 1997-98 school year, 25,506 or 26% of all Black students who received undergraduate degrees graduated from HBCUs (Hoffman, 2001). Another recent source provided slightly higher figures: Thomas (2001) stated that over the past 10 years there has been a 30% increase in HBCU enrollment and that 28% of all African Americans who earn bachelor's degrees graduate from HBCUs.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Despite the success of many HBCUs in enrolling and graduating a substantial number of African American college students, these institutions also face challenges in increasing their retention rates. A vast majority of research on freshmen retention has been conducted at PWIs. There is a paucity of empirical research targeted on retention at HBCUs. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining the relationship between freshman retention and selected student services at three private HBCUs. This study is, therefore, of value in that it explicitly targets a heretofore under investigated dimension of student retention. Moreover, it provides information on students' collective perceptions on specific areas of student services that impact their persistence.

The following types of HBCUs were included in this study: single sex male, single-sex female, and co-educational. Over one thousand freshman college students

(n=1014) were surveyed about their perceptions of the availability and quality of the student services at their institutions. The following areas of student services were examined: enrollment management, financial assistance, residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services, and academic support services. The research literature on student retention reveals that the availability and quality of the aforementioned student services is directly linked to decreasing student attrition.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature is divided into two sections. The first section summarizes Astin and Tinto's research on selected variables related to student services and retention. Their research is highlighted as it is seminal in the field and provided the theoretical framework for this inquiry. More specifically, the second section examines Black students and college persistence.

Astin and Tinto's early studies revealed that the more students become academically and socially integrated in their institution the more likely they are to persist. A thorough examination of Astin's Theory of Student Involvement reveals that it is based on his systematic investigations of several different kinds of experiences which promote student success. Astin (1975) identified the following six factors in the college environment that significantly affect persistence in college.

1. Effects of Place of Residence. From 1977 through 1993, Astin's findings pertaining to student residence have been consistent. Attending a small, often single gender private college was found to provide the greatest opportunities for student

involvement and participation (Astin, 1977). Living on campus was further positively associated with satisfaction with college experience and retention. This pattern was observed among all categories of students regardless of sex, race, academic ability, or family background. Unlike commuter students, residential students exhibited greater involvement and attachment to undergraduate life. Living in a dormitory was also positively associated with interaction with faculty and support services, participation in organizations and social fraternities and sororities, and achievement of leadership in organizations and athletics. Astin (1993) reported a high positive correlation between on-campus housing and satisfaction with faculty, attainment of the bachelor's degree, and willingness to re-enroll in the same institution for advance study.

2. Effects of Academic Pursuits. Being academically involved is defined as the extent to which the students work hard at their studies, the number of hours spent in course preparation, good study habits and interest in their courses. An extensive involvement in academic pursuits had an interesting pattern of effects. Students who were heavily involved in academics were less likely than average students to show changes in personality and behavior that normally result from college attendance. Equally significant, being academically involved was strongly related to satisfaction with all aspects of college life except friendship with other students. Yet this was balanced by the satisfaction which resulted from the recognition and rewards given for academic excellence. More than any other institutional characteristic, frequent interaction with faculty was related to student satisfaction with college.

3. Effects of Employment. Astin (1975, 1993) reported that a student's chances of graduating from college were significantly influenced by the type and extent of involvement in employment. Full-time employment had uniformly negative outcomes as

did holding a part-time job off campus. Students with off-campus jobs were more likely to drop out of school if their work was related to career goals. In addition to the negative effect on degree completion, working had a negative effect on other outcomes as well, including GPA, college satisfaction, willingness to re-enroll in college and growth in cultural awareness. However, holding a job on campus was positively associated with attainment of a bachelor's degree. As compared with students who worked off-campus, students who were employed on campus had the possibility of more frequent contact with other students, faculty, and staff as well as a greater degree of immersion in the college environment.

4. Effects of Financial Aid. While different forms of student aid did affect retention, the changing requirements and increasing complexity of the financial aid process resulted in contradictory findings. Astin (1975) supported the argument that student retention was enhanced by scholarships and work-study programs. Grants were also associated with a small increase in persistence rates. The amount of grant support appeared to be a major factor in student persistence among African American students. Participation in federal work-study programs was reported as enhancing student persistence among African-American and non-African American women students. In general, any form of aid appeared to be most effective when it was not combined with other kinds of assistance. This was particularly true of work-study programs that tended to loose their beneficial impact when combined with grants or loans. Surprisingly, Astin's most recent investigations (1993) did not support his earlier findings. He reported that "State assistance and practically every form of federal aid (Pell grants, Perkins loans, work-study, SEOGs, and Stafford Guaranteed Student Loans) have no discernible effect on student development" (368). No explanation is provided for this

finding. Institutionally-based scholarship continued to be reported as having a direct effect on college GPA and graduating with honors. Likewise, receiving aid based on "special talent," such as athletic or artistic ability, had a positive effect.

5. Effects of Interactions with Student Peers. This broad category of involvement included items such as discussion on class content with other students, working on class projects, tutoring other students, participating in intramural sports, student clubs, organizations, social fraternities and sororities. A pervasive pattern of positive benefits and overall college satisfaction were associated with frequent student interactions. Among the self-reported changes correlated with student-student interaction were growth in the following areas: leadership abilities, interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, analytical and problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and general knowledge (Astin 1985, 1993).

6. Effects of Counseling. Student involvement with counseling was measured in two categories: career counseling and personal or psychological counseling. The effects of each were markedly different (1993). Career counseling which included tutoring services, other academic assistance, academic advisement, and job placement was associated with self-reported student growth and high satisfaction. Career counseling was also positively associated with several behavioral outcomes such as being elected to student office and tutoring other students. In contrast, receiving psychological counseling was not associated with satisfaction. In fact, Astin (1993) concluded "it...has a significant effect on feeling overwhelmed and a substantial negative effect on self-rated emotional health" (p. 392). A note of caution is warranted here: feelings of being depressed and overwhelmed may have been the antecedent causes of seeking psychological counseling, rather than the effects of such counseling.

The following section provides summaries of what Tinto identified as crucial areas in which institutional action via student affairs can be particularly effective in the longitudinal process of retention. One primary contribution of Tinto's college retention theory is that it provides insights into the stages and sources which impact student persistence.

Enrollment Management

The first stage in the retention process is the student's initial contact with the university through activities related to enrollment management such as application and admission to the institution. It is essential that the information dispensed by enrollment management personnel regarding different kinds of programs and the range of social life be honest and realistic. Painting a glowing picture of an institution can possibly increase enrollments initially, but it can also promote unrealistic expectations, later disappointments, and often subsequent withdrawal from school. Catalogs, brochures, and application materials are typical sources used to provide information; yet high school newspapers, teacher organizations and publications, informed representatives at college fairs, and alumni associations can also be effectively utilized to present an image of an institution. Thus, through accurate pre-entry information aimed at the needs of prospective students, enrollment management can be an effective tool in reducing voluntary student departure.

Orientation Programs

Another significant early contact program in the integration and retention process involves orientation procedures. Most orientation programs seek to provide entering freshmen with information. Yet these programs often give an incomplete picture of the

intellectual and social communities that exist on campus. It is during this foundational period that new students should be informed about how to establish personal contacts with individuals who can provide assistance. Furthermore, effective interaction goes beyond simply providing information it necessitates bringing in upperclassmen, faculty, and staff to meet with new students.

Counseling and Advisory Programs

The utilization of counseling and advising programs early in the freshman year is another means of promoting integration into the college environment and student persistence. What is critical here is not just that services are available but the manner in which they are perceived. Advising and counseling services are more accepted as integral and positive when all students participate, not only students who are experiencing difficulty. Moreover, effective counseling and advisory programs are linked to other student service activities. One category of integrated first-year activity involves rituals and ceremonies which can assist students in establishing commonly held values and in making personal linkages to the college community. A second application of integrated first-year academic program is the use of the core courses which cover a wide range of social and intellectual issues rather than required courses in discrete disciplines.

Financial Assistance Programs

Tinto's findings support other research that affirms that short-term financial problems can cause students to withdraw temporarily or permanently and that financial aid can, in some cases, helps student overcome difficulties. However, Tinto asserts that all forms of financial assistance do not work equally well. For instance, on-campus

work-study is seen as preferable to direct financial aid. Surprisingly, Tinto asserted that financial issues are of secondary rather than primary significance in the retention process. Tinto offered the following statements as support for his position:

> For most students, persistence is more reflective of the character of their social and intellectual experiences on campus than it is of their financial resources.

This does not mean that some students, especially those from less advantaged backgrounds, may not require or need financial assistance. Rather it suggests that individual response to financial stress is conditioned by other forces, namely those associated with the interactive character of student life on campus. The more rewarding student life is perceived to be, the greater, generally speaking, will be the person's willingness to withstand even great financial hardship. Conversely, unrewarding experiences in the academic and/or social communities of the college may lead students to withdraw in the face of even quite minimal financial stress. The citation of financial stress as a reason for withdrawal is sometimes a polite way of describing one's displeasure with the character of one's social and/or intellectual life within the institution (p.158).

The problems related to researching retention rates of any cohort of African American college students are, to a significant degree, complicated by the various kinds of institutions in which these students are enrolled (Mow & Nettles, 1990). These institutions are classified as either public or private; 2-year or 4-year; sectarian or non-sectarian; and PWIs or HBCUs as well as sub-categories within several divisions such as 2-year public HBCUs and 4-year private HBCUs. Further, investigations more often treat African American students as a monolithic group and provide limited discussions of how

retention is influenced by institutional type, institutional mission, or particular divisions of student services within an institution.

Over the past decade insights into Black college students have been presented in two basic formats: statistical reports and empirical studies. In the first category data are presented in tables which list rates of access, racial and ethnic distribution of enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment(U.S. Department of Education, 2000; U. S. Census Bureau, 2000; Synder, 1998; Digest of Education Statistics, 1998). Additionally, empirical studies which have examined Black student retention have progressed along two lines of inquiry. One, is to compare Black students' performances with those of other minority groups, including Native American, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. Typical of investigations in this category is the work of Mow and Nettles (1990). A second source of information is found in descriptive and comparative studies of the various academic and social experiences of Black students enrolled at PWIs and at HBCUs (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1995; Sims, 1999; Cross, 1998; Person & Christensen, 1996; Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999; Pounds, 1989).

Three different investigations serve well in explicating the experiences of African American students at different types of institutions. Allen (1992) conducted a comparative investigation of Black students' performances at PWIs and HBCUs in which he illuminated factors which influenced academic success, social involvement, and occupational aspirations. His findings suggested that Black students' outcomes are determined by their immediate environment; specifically, the manner in which students perceived, responded, and approached difficult situations ultimately determined whether or not the college experience was successful. Using college racial composition as a predictor, Allen concluded: "Students in the sample who attended historically Black

universities reported better academic performance, greater social involvement, and higher occupational aspirations than students who attended predominately White institutions. In short, the college experience was most successful (measured by these outcomes) for African American students with Black majority student populations"(p. 39).

Similar studies have compared Blacks and Whites on a range of student retention concerns. Galicki and McEwen (1989) conducted a study of persistence rates of Black and White undergraduate students at one large institution, the University of Maryland at College Park. The four-year study measured persistence for eight consecutive fall-spring semesters. This comparative study supported Tinto's theory that residential students have a higher rate of persistence. The following results were among Galicki and McEwen's findings: African American commuters had the lowest persistence rate (45%) followed by White commuters (60%), African American residence students (70.4%), and White residence students (80.6%). Additionally most African American students who were dismissed for academic reasons were commuters.

A three-year longitudinal study of 172 African American students (Flowers & Pascarella, 1999) again pointed to the positive effects of living in on-campus housing. Irrespective of individual background differentials, college racial composition, and student body's academic ability, living on campus greatly improved third year students' critical thinking and reading comprehension.

Beil, Reisen, Zea, and Caplan (1999) conducted a longitudinal study to predict retention from a sample of first-year students at a predominately White, residential, private research university. Participants were 512 residential students whose median age was 18; the sample consisted of 60% females and 40% males; the ethnic composition was 70% White, 13% Asian American, 8% African American, and 3% Latino. A self-report

questionnaire was the instrument used in the procedure. Findings support Tinto's theory in part: that is academic and social integration indirectly rather directly effect retention. More precisely, this study demonstrated that a student's academic and social interaction influences level of commitment to the institution, and ultimately it is commitment that impacts retention. These findings held true across students' racial categorization.

Virtually all universities are committed to expending human and financial resources to increase student retention. More complete knowledge of how student services can be effectively utilized in meeting this institutional goal can be obtained through studying different theoretical formulations. A thorough examination of theoretical constructs as well as related literature indicate the complexity of retention is best understood through a consideration of students' perceptions and behaviors as well as institutional characteristics.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This research investigation was conducted to empirically determine if a relationship exists between freshmen retention and selected student service variables in three private HBCUs. The data were collected via questionnaires administered in Freshmen Orientations classes during the fall semester of 2000. Six hypotheses were investigated relative to the independent and dependent variables. Based on the review of literature the following independent variables were examined in relation to the dependent variable freshman retention: enrollment management, financial assistance, residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services, and academic support services.

Hypotheses were reviewed and accepted or rejected based on the .05 level of significance.

Over two thousand questionnaires were distributed to freshman students at three participating HBCUs. One thousand fourteen properly completed surveys were returned from the three institutions. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of 77 items. Eight of the 77 items, in the first section of the questionnaire, required students to provide demographic information. The remaining 69 items measured the independent and dependent variables. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic information as well as student responses to the availability and quality of selected student services. The independent and dependent variables were analyzed using the Pearson r Correlation Coefficient. The Stepwise Multiple Regression tests were run to determine which one of the independent variables was the strongest predictor of retention.

The majority of respondents to this survey fit the following demographic profile: female (53.9%), 19 years old or younger (94.7%), with family incomes greater than $45,000 (62%). Participants in this study were full-time students (99.0%) who resided on-campus (87.0%). Notably, thirty percent or more of the participants' parents had a college education. Respondents reported that 32.6 percent of fathers and 35 percent of mothers held a college degree. Table 1 displays the demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Variable	Number of Responses	Percentage
Gender		
Male	467	46.1%
Female	545	53.9%
Total	1,012	100%
Age		
19 or less	959	94.7%
20 to 23	46	4.5%
24 to 29	7	0.7%
30 or older	1	0.1%
Total	1,013	100%
Estimated Family Gross Income		
$55,000 or greater	379	40.0%
Between $45,000 and $54,999	119	12.6%
Between $35,000 and 44,999	133	14.1%
Between $25,000 and 34,999	147	15.6%
Less than $25,000	167	17.7%
Total	945	100%

Note: Missing data where totals do not equal 1014

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Number of Responses	Percentage
Institution Type		
All Male	388	38.2%
All Female	302	29.8%
Coeducational	324	32.0%
Total	1,014	100%
Current Residence		
On-Campus	879	87.0%
Off-Campus	131	13.0%
Total	1,010	100%
Current Enrollment		
Full-time	972	99.0%
Part-time	10	1.0%
Total	982	100%
Highest Level of Education of Father		
Elementary School	8	0.9%
Middle School	18	1.9%
High School	307	32.8%
Vocational School	92	9.8%
College Degree	305	32.6%
Graduate Degree	206	22.0%
Total	936	100%
Highest Level of Education of Mother		
Elementary School	4	0.4%
Middle School	11	1.1%
High School	272	27.1%
Vocational School	127	12.7%
College Degree	351	35.0%
Graduate Degree	238	23.7%
Total	1,003	100%

Note: Missing data where totals do not equal 1014

For this study, survey items were positively skewed and covered six areas including enrollment management, financial assistance, residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services, and academic support services. For the area of *enrollment management*, item mean scores ranged from 1.67 to 2.19. The mean score for this variable was 1.99. This indicates that participants disagreed with items on the survey pertaining to their institution's ability to provide quality pre-entry materials about the institution and financial aid packages as well as pre-entry access to financial aid counselors.

In the area of *financial assistance*, item mean scores ranged from 1.06 to 2.07. The mean score for this variable was 1.85. This indicates that participants disagreed with items on the survey pertaining to their institution's ability to provide access to informed financial counseling about the attainability of government loans, institutional grants, and work study.

In the area of *residence life*, item mean scores ranged from 2.3 to 3.01. The mean score for this variable was 2.56 which indicates that participants agreed that their institution provides residence halls that are adequate, safe and conducive to learning.

In the area of *extracurricular activities*, item mean scores ranged from 2.69 to 2.99. The mean score for this variable was 2.83 which indicates that participants agreed that their institution provides diverse and accessible extracurricular activities related to college transition.

In the area of *counseling services*, item mean scores ranged from 2.47 to 2.92. The mean score for this variable was 2.71 which indicates that participants agreed that their institution provides access to counselors, encourage the utilization of counseling services, and encourage participation in group counseling sessions.

In the area of *academic support services*, item mean scores ranged from 2.89 to 3.21. The mean score for this variable was 3.00 which indicates that participants agreed that their institution provides and encourages diverse academic support services for students with special learning needs.

The final section of the survey asked participants to indicate whether or not they planned to graduate from the institution in which they were currently enrolled. Eighty-five percent of the 1014 participants responded that they planned to graduate from their current institution. However, participants did indicate factors which negatively influence their decision to return to their respective institutions. In ascending order, student responded as follows:

1. financial aid is not synchronized with admission;
2. housing facilities are not well maintained;
3. registration process is inefficient;
4. student rules/policies are too restrictive.
5. building maintenance is neglected;

This section presents the statistically significant relationships that exist between the independent variables using Pearson r correlation coefficients. The Step Wise Multiple Regression test was used to determine which of the independent variables was the strongest predictor of retention. Tables 2 and 3 provide the results of the Pearson r and Step Wise Multiple Regression tests.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients Between Freshmen Retention and Selected Student Services

	Student Retention
Enrollment Management	
Pearson Correlation	.231**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	996
Financial Assistance	-.155**
Pearson Correlation	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	963
N	
Residence Life	.148 **
Pearson Correlation	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	840
N	
Extracurricular Activities	.145**
Pearson Correlation	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	975
N	
Counseling Services	
Pearson Correlation	.297**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	939
Academic Support Services	
Pearson Correlation	.149**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N	955

**Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level. Table 2 reveals that statistically significant relationships exist between the dependent and independent variables.

Table 3

Results of the Stepwise Multiple Regression for the Dependent Variable Retention and the Independent Variables

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Counseling Services	.331	.109	.108	25.3221
Financial Assistance	.415	.173	.170	24.4242
Enrollment Management	.423	.179	.175	24.3503

The criteria for variables to be entered in the stepwise analysis were set at .050. The independent variable *counseling services* yielded an R square value of 0.109, *financial assistance* yielded an R square value of 0.173, and enrollment management yielded an R square value of 0.179. The R square value revealed that *enrollment management* was the strongest predictor of retention among the independent variables.

Summary

Of the six independent variables in the study, participants indicated greatest concern about enrollment management and financial assistance. Students were pleased with the quality and accessibility of residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services, and academic support services. Equally important, the data analysis revealed

that enrollment management (pre-entry materials about the institution, financial aid packages, pre-entry access to financial aid counselors) was the strongest predictor of retention.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

If HBCUs are going to remain competitive with other institutions in attracting and retaining African American and other minority students they must focus on providing access to quality student services. This study utilized student services as an approach to examine freshmen retention at three private HBCUs. Students who participated in this study expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with two areas of student services, enrollment management and financial assistance.

With regard to *enrollment management*, freshman did not believe that their college gave them adequate pre-entry information about sources of financial aid. When they did receive pre-entry financial aid information they did not believe that they received it in a timely manner or that they were given sufficient time to thoroughly assess the information before responding. Additionally, students indicated the following concerns about their financial aid counselor. They did not feel comfortable speaking with such counselors about their financial aid needs; they did not view the counselors as well informed about college-based financial assistance programs; and they did not believe that financial aid counselors were available when they needed them.

The following recommendations are provided in response to these concerns. Enrollment management personnel including the offices of admissions, registrar, and financial aid are in key positions to promote freshmen retention. Each department provides an opportunity for student's initial integration into the college community.

Therefore, it is imperative that all pre-entry information related to the institutions academic and social programs and policies be efficiently, clearly, and accurately disseminated.

With regard to *financial assistance*, students did not feel confident that their institution was interested in or could meet their financial needs nor did they believe that the college offered meaningful financial assistance to attend the college. Students expressed the strongest concern about the ability to obtain work study "without a hassle" and did not believe that financial aid counselors made every effort to meet their financial aid needs.

Financial assistance services related to student need, loan options, and work-study have an effect freshman persistence. Thus, financial aid officers should consistently advertise, communicate, and hold review sessions with students concerning various financial assistance options.

In this study, students were pleased with the quality and availability of *residence life*, *extracurricular activities*, *counseling services*, and *academic support services*. They indicated very few concerns about these components of student services. In the area of residence life students agreed that residence life staff were supportive, available and professional. They believed that their residence halls were safe and conducive to learning and that the planned activities were diverse and interesting. Students only concerns about on-campus housing were the quality of the residence hall facilities and rules and procedures that did not treat them "like an adult."

All respondents agreed that diverse offerings are available through the *extracurricular program*. Students indicated that such programming is accessible and interesting and that they feel comfortable attending such activities on campus.

Additionally, students felt that the extracurricular program meets the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds, helps all students become more responsible in less structured environments and encourages them to undertake leadership responsibilities.

While students agreed that quality *counseling services* are provided and that they are encouraged to utilize such services, they expressed concern about being able to identify counseling centers. However, once in contact with counselors, freshmen found these professionals to be sensitive to their personal needs and able to help them better adjust to college life both academically and socially.

Finally, students were positive about the quality and accessibility of *academic support services*. Freshman believed that they were informed about the services available to them and encouraged to utilize such services. Additionally, they found that it was easy to get quality tutorial assistance and indicated that "specialized assistance is available to students with learning disabilities."

This study showed that freshmen at the selected HBCUs were largely pleased with the quality and availability of student services. They agreed that residence life, extracurricular activities, counseling services and academic support services were acceptable. Freshman believed that enrollment management and financial assistance services were weak.

While much of the research on Black college student retention has focused on socio-cultural barriers to academic success and social adjustment to college life, this study found that the major factor influencing student retention was the college's ability to communicate effectively at the pre-entry phase about its offerings especially in the areas of enrollment management and financial assistance. Colleges and universities should develop more expeditious and efficient means of communicating accurate pre-entry

information about the institution to students and parents. At this critical juncture students start to develop their commitment to persist at the institution. It is the student's commitment to persist that most notably impacts freshman retention.

It is clear from numerous studies that access to financial assistance is a primary influence on student retention, particularly for African American, other minority, and lower-SES college students. This study, however, suggests that the institution's capacity to increase student retention is intimately tied to its ability to communicate with students early about the availability of a variety of financial resources. Students' perceptions that staff are inaccessible, indifferent, and lack helpful knowledge dramatically influences the student's conscious and consistent commitment to persist. College and university leaders need to be apprised of students' dissatisfaction with the quality and accessibility of the staff in their college's financial aid office. This dissatisfaction points to the need for HBCUs to develop a comprehensive professional development program for all student service personnel which focuses on quality customer service and knowledge of government loans, institutional grants, work study and alternative financial planning for college.

The results of this research show that there are several ways to improve the retention rates at HBCUs. These findings provide empirical support that there is a direct relationship between the students' perception of the quality and availability of student services and freshmen retention. In sum, private HBCUs have an opportunity to correct retention problems that confront them by strengthening the quality of student services they provide.

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